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Waterways Experiment
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RECNOTES

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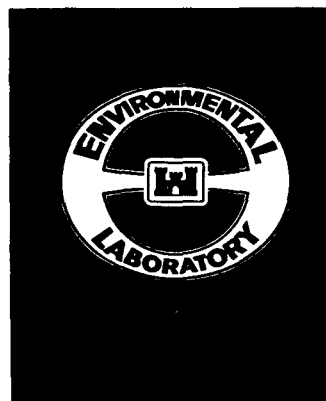
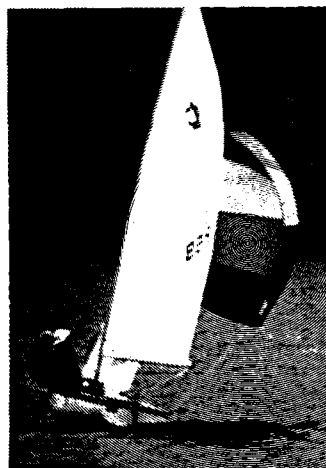
Dave Wahus, Executive Director of the Recreation Task Force, answers questions from the public at the regional workshop in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

US Army Corps of Engineers Recreation Study A Plan Prepared for the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)

At the request of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, ASA(CW), the Chief of Engineers established a Task Force in September 1989 to study recreation at US Army Corps of Engineers water resource development projects. The purpose of the study was to develop a proposed plan to maintain and enhance public recreational opportunities at Corps projects while reducing net Federal expenditures for recreation. The closure of recreation facilities and the deferral of maintenance as a means of reducing Federal expenditures were not considered; however, management efficiencies as a method of reducing the

Federal expenditures were evaluated. Existing constraints in law, regulation, or policy were identified, but did not limit proposals considered in the development of the proposed plan. The Deputy Chief of Engineers served as Chairman of the Task Force. A Policy Steering Committee, composed of senior level Corps personnel, advised the Task Force Chairman on strategies and alternatives for achieving the study objective.

NOTE: This article summarizes the Corps Recreation Task Force study report. The author of this article was David J. Wahus.



Hosting a total of over two billion visitor hours of use, the Corps of Engineers is the second largest Federal provider of outdoor recreation opportunities and the largest Federal provider of water-based recreation. Through its system of Corps and non-Corps managed recreation areas, the Corps provides these opportunities on less than 2 percent of the Federal land base and with less than 10 percent of the Federal funds expended for recreation resources. In 1989, there were 4,290 recreation areas on 459 Corps water resource projects. Fifty-seven percent of the recreation areas were managed directly by the Corps. The remaining 43 percent were managed by other Federal, state and local agencies, concessionaires, and quasi-public agencies. Corps projects having recreation areas are located in all but seven states.

According to the United States Travel and Tourism Administration, the travel and tourism industry is the third largest retail-service industry in the United States. In 1988, foreign and domestic travelers spent more than \$300 billion for goods and services in the United States, generating more than 5.5 million jobs. In 1988, trip spending alone by visitors to Corps projects exceeded \$10 billion, accounting for approximately 3-1/2 percent of all tourism spending in the United States and resulting in about 5 percent of tourism-generated employment.

Prior Studies and Reports

Since 1969, the Corps has taken an in-depth look at its recreation function through four major studies and reports. Two national reviews of outdoor recreation were also conducted during this period. A review of these reports indicates the Corps and others continue to face many of the same issues in providing needed and desired levels of recreation with limited resources. These issues include importance of local organizations in the planning for and provision of recreation opportunities, capability of non-Federal public and private entities to increase their involvement in providing recreation opportunities, potential for greater involvement of volunteers, and the role of fees and other revenue sources in providing and supporting recreation opportunities.

Study Process

Notification of Others. To ensure that all interested parties were informed of the study and its progress, the Chairpersons and ranking minority members of the United States House of Representatives and Senate Appropriations and Authorization Committees and the Governors of each state were

informed by letter of the Task Force initiative. The public was informed through public news releases. Oral briefings were given to the Office of Management and Budget and members of Congressional staffs and periodic progress reports were submitted on a regular basis to the ASA(CW) and Corps officials.

Information Collection. Several methods were used to collect information on the Corps' past and present management programs and strategies, as well as its role in the recreation/tourism industry. Five in-house information collection task forces were convened to identify the Corps' current management program and strategies. The Corps also contacted a broad spectrum of the general public, non-Federal public agencies, concessionaires, members of the recreation and tourism industry, the environmental community and each state Governor to solicit opinions, concerns, and ideas. State and local officials, academic leaders, corporate representatives, public user groups, and individuals were also personally interviewed for their reactions and recommendations concerning the study objectives. After a preliminary compilation and evaluation of suggested management programs and strategies by a Corps field review group, six public workshops were held throughout the country to solicit additional public input.

Review and Evaluation. All data received were analyzed in terms of impact on both aspects of the study objective, compatibility with other project purposes, law or policy changes needed, controversial aspects, pros and cons, and potential for success, given all relevant factors. Those options that could potentially result in the greatest reduction in net Federal expenditures or that collectively could result in increased efficiency or enhanced recreation opportunities were recommended for implementation or further study. Some of the recommendations stand alone, while others must be pursued in conjunction with one or more recommended actions to maximize the benefit gained. Those requiring only policy changes are identified, as are those requiring legislative initiatives.

Plan Formulation. For plan formulation, detailed evaluation of specific options and information about the fiscal, political, and institutional environment under which specific options would be implemented were considered. Over ninety options were investigated and twenty-four options or related suggestions were included in the plan. The plan identifies and provides general implementation strategies. In addition to those included in the plan, nineteen options could be pursued locally (Corps-wide change in policy or guidance is not needed) and eighteen options

should be given further consideration. The recommended plan, described below, does not represent the only combination of options that could be recommended, but provides a pragmatic beginning for providing recreation at Corps projects on a more self-sustaining basis.

Findings

Findings from the public include:

- The recreation consumer appears ready and willing to pay higher fees especially where the revenues are returned to the areas in which they are collected.
- A few states or local governments may have both the willingness and the available funding to develop new recreation facilities or to take over operation and maintenance of Corps recreation areas, but the majority do not.
- There is little opposition to encouragement of private sector cooperation per se, but there is strong opposition to arrangements in which private sector involvement results in private exclusive use.
- The private sector has shown some interest in providing additional recreation facilities and operation and maintenance services at existing Corps areas in conjunction with major resort development; however, the Corps needs to improve its ability to attract private sector interests.
- Potential exists for increasing non-Federal public and private participation on a long-term basis; however, large-scale development of new areas or

widespread takeover of Corps recreation areas by non-Federal sources in the short run is not likely.

- More immediate impacts can be accomplished through increasing revenues and augmenting existing resources. Estimated gross revenues ranging from \$20 million to \$60 million per year could be generated from expanded recreation fees.
- For the most part, data base needs to meet the study objective are being addressed by the Corps on an ongoing basis.
- Corps fee competition with other agencies or private sector providers of recreation appears to be limited. However, on-site surveys are necessary to determine if specific areas of unfair competition exist.
- There is frustration with the Corps' bureaucracy, including delays in approvals, inconsistent messages from different administrative layers, and the complexity of regulations.
- There is widespread support for the Corps' role in protecting the natural environment at its projects.
- There is widespread and substantial support for a continued major role for the Corps in recreation.

Recommended Options

Many options for addressing the study objective were identified, but none will provide a panacea for maintaining or enhancing recreation opportunities while reducing Federal expenditures. There is, however, great opportunity for increased partnerships in the provision of new recreation facilities and in operation and maintenance of Corps recreation areas. The



Corps of Engineers employees participating in a workshop on the Recreation Study at the Natural Resources Management Conference in Nashville, Tennessee

success of these partnerships depends on the development and implementation of an overall strategy for the Corps' recreation program.

The Corps should take a more businesslike approach to the management of its recreation program, while recognizing that nonmonetary benefits are important, as well. The Corps should view its recreation facilities as regional assets, rather than as economic liabilities. An important part of this approach is the return of revenue to the projects that generate the revenue. This is important to make such programs more acceptable to recreation users and service providers, and also to field level employees, who are essential to an effective asset management program.

To meet the study objective on a long-term basis, the Corps needs an implementation strategy for the recommended plan. The plan will focus on the Corps' role in providing public recreation, both through its outgrant program and through direct Corps management.

The major items set forth below represent both actions to be undertaken in the immediate future as well as those that would provide a basis for long-term action.

To increase revenue and augment existing resources, the Corps should:

1. Expand the fee collection program with all revenues retained for recreation project purposes.
 - Seek authorization for recreation-based user fees, such as the proposed day use fee legislation included in the FY 90 budget submittal.
 - Conduct further demand and marketing studies to determine what additional fees would be feasible and at what level.
 - Develop guidance to expand the use of variable pricing in the fee program.
 - Encourage Districts to selectively relax the 14-day length-of-stay limitation.
 - Seek passage of legislation to eliminate the free campground requirement.
 - Seek incorporation of selected recreation areas into a nationwide reservation system.
2. Increase outgrant revenue and return a portion of the revenue to the corps recreation program.
 - Seek legislation to place a cap (at current levels) on the 75 percent of Federal lease revenue returned to the states and to redirect the remaining lease, license, and shoreline use permit revenue from the Federal Treasury to the Corps' recreation program.

- Evaluate options for increasing outgrant/permit revenue.

3. Expand the use of volunteers and supplemental labor sources.

- Amend Engineer Regulation 1130-2-432 to allow volunteers and supplemental labor sources, where appropriate, to handle money at campgrounds, etc.
- Develop a volunteer and supplemental labor source manual to include guidance on identifying potential duties that could be performed; recruitment, training, and supervision for these labor sources; and case studies of successful programs used by the Corps and others.

4. Expand Corps use of cooperating associations to provide recreation facilities and services.

- Provide guidance to Corps field elements on entering agreements with cooperating associations.

5. Initiate a challenge cost share program.

- Seek legislation for implementing a Challenge Cost Share Program, such as the legislation prepared as part of the President's FY 91 budget proposal.

To encourage and assist state and local governments to increase their participation in O&M of recreation areas, while recognizing their inherent funding difficulties, the Corps should:

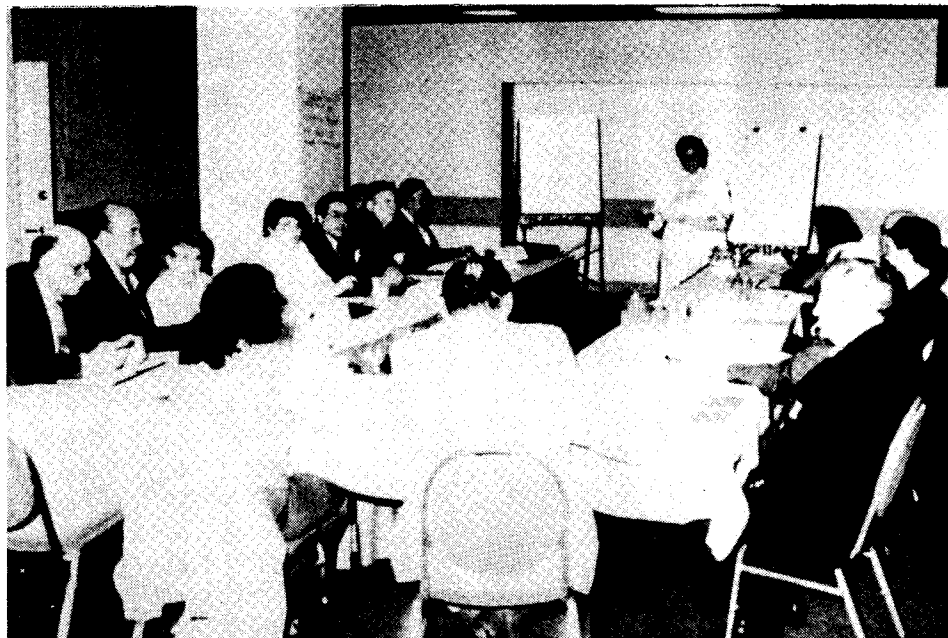
1. Assist non-Federal partners in generating their own recreation funding.

- Provide non-Federal agencies with visitation data, including visitor expenditure profiles, and operation and maintenance cost, where appropriate, by individual recreation areas for their analyses.
- Revise Corps policy to allow non-Federal public partners to charge out of state fees for nonresidents.
- Revise Corps policy to selectively allow overnight stays beyond the 14-day limit during periods of low use.

2. Reduce the non-Federal public partner's cost of doing business with the Corps.

- Revise Corps policy to allow replacement of annual and five-year lessee management plans with joint preparation of the project Operational Management Plans which guide the overall management of the projects.
- Encourage Districts to selectively lengthen leases under existing policy.

A small group breakout session facilitated by Lynn Mortenson at the regional workshop in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



3. Renovate existing areas at Federal expense for turnover to non-Federal public entities.

- Seek internal budgetary changes to provide a funding source for renovation.
- Prior to a non-Federal public commitment to assume long-term operation and maintenance funding on renovated areas, conduct an analysis of the cost of the renovation versus the cost of non-Federal operations and maintenance (O&M) over the life of the renovated facilities to determine if net Federal expenditures will be reduced.

To increase the opportunities for public recreation and help alleviate Corps funding burden on existing recreation areas, the Corps should:

1. Improve Corps knowledge of private sector interests and needs to enhance private sector involvement in public recreation to the maximum extent practicable.
 - Expeditiously complete the Recreation Partnership Initiative to develop a methodology and criteria to evaluate the development potential on Corps projects and to attract additional private sector involvement.
2. Improve the overall business environment to encourage private involvement.
 - Increase the lease terms to a maximum of 50 years where appropriate.

- Revise Corps policy to selectively allow overnight stays beyond the 14-day limit during periods of low use.

To guide the overall direction of the recreation program, the Corps should:

1. Develop an implementation strategy for the recommended plan.
 - Convene a Corps Task Force to develop an implementation strategy.
 - Develop a public affairs and information program in support of the implementation strategy.

Implementation

These selected options provide both short- and long-term strategies for accomplishing the study objective of maintaining or enhancing recreation opportunities while reducing Federal expenditures. Many options were presented and discussed. While most of these options will not work in every situation, they will work in selective situations. There are not only significant regional differences, but also differences among individual projects in the same region. It may be premature at this juncture to determine what "mix" of options would work best in every situation. The implementation plan provides general actions needed to initiate the recommended changes; however, further study may be needed to determine the practicality of local implementation of some of the recommended options.

Impacts on Public Recreation. In the short run, the major impacts on public recreation would be from expansion of the recreation user fee program and from increased use of volunteer programs. Both would provide additional funding or work effort to maintain or enhance public recreation areas with reduced Federal expenditures.

On a longer term basis, there is potential for increasing non-Federal public and private participation. The Recreation Partnership Initiative, in particular, could result in the identification of development opportunities that would expand the types of recreation opportunities available at some Corps recreation projects.

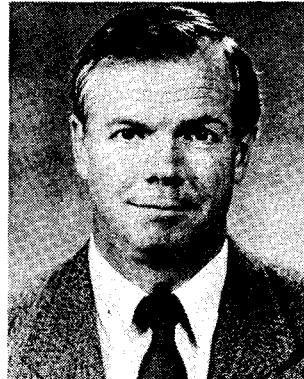
Federal Cost Reductions. Expansion of the recreation fee program could result in gross receipts of approximately \$20 to \$60 million annually, but further demand studies are needed to evaluate expanded fee collection programs and their effect on recreation use.

The \$2.7 million in volunteer services received by the Corps in 1989 could be increased threefold with expanded resource augmentation programs. In some instances, such as the Challenge Cost Share Program, this would result in stretching the Federal O&M dollar. In other instances, it could result in direct O&M savings.

Approximate monetary impacts on the Corps O&M program from increased non-Federal public and private involvement are difficult to estimate because of uncertainty over levels of interest in plan recommendations. Direct Federal revenues from the outgrants are limited, but substantial cost avoidance occurs with non-Federal management of recreation opportunities at Corps projects.

Conclusions

Significant potential exists for meeting the study objective through increased participation of non-Federal public and private partners in the Corps recreation program on a long-term basis. However, large-scale development of new areas or takeover of Corps recreation areas by non-Federal sources is not likely in the immediate future. This is due in large measure to the funding difficulties experienced by the non-Federal public agencies and the private sector's limited knowledge of the potential for development on Corps lands. More immediate impacts can be accomplished through effective partnerships with the public (through expanded fee and volunteer programs). To meet the study objective on a long-term basis, the Corps needs an implementation strategy for the recommended plan. The plan would focus on the Corps' role in providing public recreation, both through its outgrant program and through direct Corps management. Incorporating the views and perspectives of Congress, the general public and non-Federal public agencies and private enterprise is essential to the success of the Corps of Engineers' recreation program.



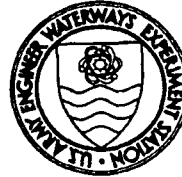
David J. Wahus was the Executive Director of the Corps Recreation Task Force. Following completion of the Task Force report, he has returned to his duties as Chief of the Recreation Programs Section, Natural Resources Management Branch at Headquarters, US Army Corps of Engineers.

The final report consists of two volumes, "U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Recreation Study, A Plan Prepared for the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)," Volume I: Main Report, and Volume II: Appendices. The final report was transmitted through the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget on 3 October 1990. Copies of the main report will be distributed to key members of Congress, Corps field offices, and members of the public upon completion of printing. One copy of Volume II will be provided to each Corps of Engineers District, Division and laboratory library.

Requests for either volume can be referred to the National Technical Information Service (NTIS). The cost (1990 prices) will be approximately \$25 for domestic and \$50 for international requests for Volume I and \$60 for domestic and \$120 for international requests for Volume II. The address and telephone number of NTIS are:

National Technical Information Service
5285 Port Royal Road
Springfield, VA 22161
(703)487-4650

The US Army Corps of Engineers Recreation Task Force recently completed a one-year review of the Corps' recreation program. The Task Force was chaired by MG R.S. Kem, Deputy Commander. The purpose, approach and findings of this review are presented in this article, which is a summarization of the Task Force's study report. Mr. David J. Wahus was the Executive Director of the Task Force. Ms. N. Theresa Hoagland of the Ohio River Division served as primary author for the study. Mr. William J. Hansen of the Corps' Water Resources Support Center, Institute for Water Resources was the Technical Study Manager, assisted by Mr. L. Leigh Skaggs.



NATURAL RESOURCES RESEARCH PROGRAM

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